

Mental health and substance abuse under health care service plan

SB 555 by Patterson (Siebert)

- DIGEST:** SB 555 would have included under the definition of a single health care service plan in the Texas Health Maintenance Organization Act a plan that provides only mental health services and substance abuse services.
- GOVERNOR'S REASON FOR VETO:** "This bill allows the creation of a single health care service plan that covers only substance abuse and mental health treatment. By law, a single health care service plan can include coverage for only one health care need. Substance abuse and mental health are not a single health care need. Collapsing these two different health conditions into a single category for the purpose of insurance could result in inappropriate diagnosis and treatment.
- "SB 555 may cause employers or individuals to have to buy two separate health insurance policies — one to cover substance abuse and mental health services and a second to cover all other health needs.
- "This bill also allows group model health maintenance organizations affiliated with a state medical school to decide what health services they will cover and to ignore mandated coverages required for all other health insurance plans in Texas. People insured through such HMO's would not be assured of the same range of insurance coverage guaranteed to people enrolled in other health insurance plans."
- RESPONSE:** Sen. Jerry Patterson, the author of SB 555, said he was "quite sure the governor didn't understand the purpose of this bill. The net result of SB 555 would have allowed more people to receive early-intervention care and treatment for mental health and substance abuse conditions through the use of lower-cost managed care services. There was no controversy — no one testified against the bill."
- Rep. Bill Siebert, the House sponsor, said the governor "struck down the opportunity for employers to provide a more comprehensive mental health/substance abuse plan to employees. Apparently no one in her office understands the benefits of this legislation. I'm disappointed I was not contacted prior to the veto. Perhaps I could have educated the governor's staff on the benefits of this legislation."

NOTES:

SB 555 was analyzed in Part Three of the May 21 *Daily Floor Report*.